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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2001/2 of 24 July 2001 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed concern about the deterioration of the situation of Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-sixth session a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report, which covers the period from September 2000 to September 2001, is based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Inquiry Commission, and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

3. The report is also based on information submitted by entities of the United Nations system providing assistance to Palestinian people, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Bank.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

The unfolding of the crisis

4. In the period under review, the region was marked by the eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, or

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second intifada. That crisis between the parties led to a year of violent confrontations which left hundreds of civilians dead, mostly Palestinians (approximately 660 of the over 800 people who died were Palestinians), and tens of thousands wounded and permanently disabled,[1] including many women and children.

5. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs in the Occupied Territories, in its reports (A/56/428 and Add.1 and A/56/491) described several cases of Palestinian women and girls having died or having been wounded by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) or by Israeli settlers as a result of the second intifada. For instance, on 3 November 2000, a 14-year-old Palestinian girl who was on her way back from school in Bethlehem was killed (see A/56/428). On another occasion, on 5 January 2001, a 19-year-old Palestinian woman from Hebron died of wounds from IDF fire in a clash which had erupted on the West Bank. On 7 May 2001, a four-month-old Palestinian baby girl became the youngest person to die in the ongoing hostilities after IDF tanks opened fire on the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The infant's mother and grandmother were also seriously injured by shrapnel (see A/56/428/Add.1). In another incident, a Palestinian woman, the mother of three children, was shot by settlers (see A/56/491).

6. The explosive situation on the ground had been further exacerbated by the Israeli settlement policy, the protracted internal and external closures of the occupied Palestinian territory, and the rapid deterioration of the Palestinian economy over the course of the year.[2]

Israeli settlements

7. The expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolishing of Palestinian homes, the destruction of land and the building of bypass roads in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to create difficulties for the Palestinians. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reported that, in the period from the beginning of the second intifada to 12 September 2001, IDF demolished a total of 559 Palestinian residential buildings and shelled a total of 3,669 residential buildings. In the same period, 112,900 olive trees were uprooted and 3,669,000 square miles of cultivated land destroyed. During 2001, the number of settlers in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip increased by 17,000 and reached nearly 227,000.[3] Such policies continued to have a deteriorating effect on Palestinians living in the occupied territory, including Palestinian women, who, being traditionally employed in the agricultural sector, suffered markedly from the destruction of the land they were cultivating.

8. Episodes of violence against the Palestinian population perpetrated by settlers were frequent. Since the start of the intifada, settlers have killed 16 Palestinian civilians.[4]

Movement restrictions and closures

9. The reporting period was characterized by the most severe restrictions on movement imposed on the Palestinian population and territory since 1967.[5] The Israeli authorities introduced a policy of recurrent and often prolonged closures. The mobility of persons, vehicles and goods was severely restricted on the borders between the Palestinian territory and Israel, between the West Bank and Jordan, and between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The closure of borders with Israel resulted in the closure of the safe passage route established as part of the peace negotiations, while internal closures within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip led to the establishment of a dense network of Israeli checkpoints which, in turn, resulted in traffic disruption and road blockades.

10. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reported that, as a result of the closures, Palestinians were kept waiting for hours at the crossing points. Women carrying babies were kept waiting under the heat of the sun for hours at a time. Delays, increased travel costs and higher instances of road accidents were repeatedly experienced by the Palestinians who, in periods of severe internal closures, were obliged to use secondary and tertiary roads. The Special Committee reported that in many instances Palestinians had to change vehicles in order to go through border crossings (see A/56/491). During this period, Palestinians often risked intimidation and harm by military authorities or settlers.[6] This situation deterred many Palestinian women, particularly older women, from crossing borders for fear of experiencing intimidation and violence, or because of the inconvenience of having to wait at the crossing points for many hours, thus precluding older women from visiting their children and families.

III. Impact of the crisis on Palestinian women and gender relations and measures taken to overcome it

Education

11. During the reporting period, schooling was disrupted by systematic restriction on movement imposed by Israel, which prevented many Palestinian children and youths from reaching their schools on a regular basis. As of June 2001, an estimated 190 schools were reported to have been temporarily closed owing to Israeli military orders, curfews or physical damage.[7] In the centre of Hebron, 34 schools were closed, leaving 460 teachers unemployed and 13,000 students without educational facilities (see E/CN.4/2001/121). Furthermore, 55 per cent of older students experienced difficulties in reaching institutions of higher education and over 1,300 Gazan students enrolled at universities in the West Bank were unable to access their campuses.[8]

12. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reported that, in East Jerusalem, an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 Arab children aged between 5 and 18 did not attend school. Tuition fees for private schools were high and there continued to be a shortage of public schools. The city spent only 7 per cent of its education budget on the Arab sector although Arabs constituted 33 per cent of the population. Girls continued to suffer from the insufficient number of schools for them. In the area of Sur Baher, for instance, there was not a single public school for girls (see A/56/428/Add.1).

13. In order to address the situation, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), through the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations supported a community-based education programme in Hebron, involving approximately 200 teachers, which allowed 12,000 children to continue their studies (see A/56/123). UNICEF organized summer training camps for youths as well as education classes for illiterate women. The latter initiative benefited 66 women.

14. Data showed that, in the 2000-2001 academic year, 477,216 pupils were enrolled in the elementary, preparatory and secondary schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), of whom 238,903, or 50.1 per cent, were women. Women accounted for 74 per cent of participants in the UNRWA pre- and in-service teacher training courses and for 65.2 per cent of trainees in the UNRWA technical/semi-professional courses. Of the 431 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 2000-2001, 43.9 per cent were held by women. That number was lower than the number of scholarships offered by UNRWA during the preceding year (673), 45.3 per cent of which benefited women.

15. UNRWA has reported that, during 2000-2001, 25 Palestinian women in Lebanon benefited from a scholarship project aimed at women and managed by UNRWA on behalf of the Canadian International Development Research Centre. Women also held 40 per cent of senior managerial posts in the UNRWA Department of Education.

16. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its Sustainable Human Development Unit, developed a project for a gender-sensitive education system aimed at assisting educational organizations in elaborating gender-sensitive curricula which address the specific needs of girls and boys. Teachers were trained to develop modules that incorporated gender concerns into the learning process. The project covered public, private and UNRWA schools.

Health

17. The current emergency situation has caused a severe breakdown in preventive services, including immunization, maternal and child health care and family services. Closures restricted the movement of patients, medical personnel and medical supplies, thus preventing many sick and injured people from accessing the care they needed and resulting in a significant increase in home deliveries, premature deliveries and stillbirths. The health system was under strain, owing particularly to the additional care needed by thousands of individuals who were wounded during the crisis.

18. Restrictions on movement limited access to primary and specialized health care, especially for Palestinians living in rural areas. The sick and wounded, as well as pregnant women, faced restricted access to hospitals. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human

Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reported that 70 per cent of the citizens in Palestinian areas could not receive medical treatment in hospitals. Many patients died at checkpoints while waiting in ambulances. Owing to restrictions, pregnant women could not go for regular check-ups and some of those women delivered babies while waiting at checkpoints.

19. The Special Committee also reported a fivefold increase in the ratio of home deliveries since the start of the intifada (see A/56/491). UNRWA statistics point to a decline in the utilization of reproductive health services at health facilities. During the crisis, women's access to prenatal care has declined by 18 per cent, deliveries in health facilities have declined by 15 per cent, postnatal care has declined by 13 per cent and access to family planning services has declined by 12 per cent.[9]

20. In order to address the situation, the World Health Organization (WHO) has assumed a leadership role in advocacy and the coordination of the health resources deployed in the occupied Palestinian territory and has set up and coordinated the field task force in the West Bank.[10]

21. UNRWA has reported that the Palestine refugee population had one of the highest birth rates in the occupied Palestinian territory. Approximately one third of women married before the age of 18 years and an equal proportion of women of reproductive age suffered from iron deficiency anaemia. The social, economic and cultural context of women's health has remained underestimated. In order to address those challenges, UNRWA has provided maternal and child health care and family planning services and sustained full immunization coverage for women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Those services were supplemented by school health services and the provision of iron supplements for women throughout pregnancy and post-delivery, as well as by health educational programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The services were implemented as multisectoral activities targeting school children and women's programme centres.

22. The programme of assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was adjusted to address the needs determined by the crisis, particularly in relation to basic health services and systems. The emergency assistance included reproductive health supplies, commodities, contraceptives and necessary equipment. It also included training of midwives on basic emergency obstetric care. Through its programme, UNFPA funded three comprehensive women's health centres in Jabalya, Hebron and El Bureij (Gaza Strip).

23. UNFPA also launched a regional gender initiative aimed at integrating gender in reproductive health as well as in developing a monitoring and evaluation system with country-specific indicators. UNFPA, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, also worked on a project to improve adolescent lives through the integration of sexual and reproductive health into the curriculum of girls' secondary schools. Support for women's health care was also provided through the strengthening of the Women's Health and Development Directorate at the Ministry of Health.

24. In Lebanon, in collaboration with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, UNICEF undertook a health education campaign which reached 85 per cent of women living in the camps. The campaign included topics such as family planning, safe motherhood practices, control of the spread of HIV and other infectious diseases, personal hygiene, and prevention of malnutrition. In West Bank and Gaza, UNICEF provided psychosocial support for Palestinian women and youth affected by the crisis through projects such as telephone hotlines for counselling.

25. UNICEF's Health and Nutrition Programme included the "Women's Health Project" which, beside upgrading the Obstetrics and Neonatal Units in four Government-operated hospitals, provided more than 140 doctors and nurses with training.

Economy

26. The border closures mentioned in paragraphs 9 and 10 above had a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy. In his report on the Palestinian economy, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority (UNSCO) stated that, according to estimates from the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Finance and the International Monetary Fund, the Palestinian economy was expected

to continue to grow as it had grown for the past three years and that real growth rates for gross domestic product and gross national product for the Palestinian territory were expected to reach 5 and 6 per cent, respectively. Instead, the imposition of movement restrictions and border closures has disrupted the economic progress of the occupied Palestinian territory.

27. Estimates by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator indicate that the total income losses of the Palestinian economy since the start of the second intifada ranged from $1.8 billion to $2.5 billion.[11] Core unemployment rose from the low of 10 per cent reached in September 2000 to 28.3 per cent by the end of 2000. Despite moderate improvements between the fourth quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001, core unemployment remained high at 26.9 per cent of the workforce. Using a broader measure to include "discouraged workers",[12] unemployment amounted to 37.8 per cent, an increase of 78 per cent from the pre-crisis levels.[13] According to the World Bank, poverty rates in the occupied Palestinian territory were expected to reach 43.8 per cent by the end of 2001 (see A/56/428), meaning that half of the population would have lived on $2.00 or less a day.

28. The crisis has exerted a structural impact on the Palestinian labour market. While the proportion of wage workers and employers in the labour force declined steeply, particularly as more than 110,000 Palestinian labourers were prevented from working in Israel (see A/56/428), the number of unpaid family workers and self-employed rose. That led to an increase in the "informalization" of the economy as well as to the worsening of labour market conditions in the context of declining domestic production and income.[14] Considering that women are highly represented in the informal labour force, that situation affected women adversely. In situations of crises and widespread poverty, women are forced to take additional economic and social burdens upon themselves.

29. Although comprehensive data on household coping strategies were scarce, existing information suggested that, owing to the increase in poverty, most Palestinian households had reduced overall consumption and were starting to spend their savings. According to a public opinion poll by Birzeit University in February 2001, 84 per cent of respondents indicated that, in order to cope with the economic downturn, they had reduced expenditures, while 55 per cent had spent accumulated savings. Furthermore, 43 per cent of respondents had taken new loans and 22 per cent had sold dowry or wedding gifts.[15]

30. Where women were heads of households, due to the death of their husband or other family members, they had to adapt to changes, including changes in their family role, under strained economic conditions. As a result, many women experienced severe psychological trauma. However, the changing role of women within the family, if accompanied by adequate economic conditions, might provide opportunities for women's empowerment as women gain new decision-making powers within the household.

31. In order to counter the disastrous economic effects of income and job losses, the organizations of the United Nations system have provided assistance through various welfare and income-generating projects.

32. In 2000-2001, UNRWA, through its Income Generation Programme, granted loans valued at $1.9 million to 3,385 women who supported 22,481 dependants. Since 1994, the Solidarity Group Lending Programme provided loans worth $12.7 million to 18,182 women organized into 2,787 solidarity groups. Those women were granted loans through a graduated lending methodology that allowed them to obtain larger loans at the end of each successful repayment cycle. The programme was self-sufficient with all operational costs and loan loss provisions covered from revenues generated by lending and banking activities. As a result of the current crisis, the annual repayment rate for the programme fell from 98.65 per cent to 87.4 per cent.

33. In its women's development project in Lebanon, UNICEF supported the camp committees' microcredit revolving loan scheme, giving priority to ensuring that women benefited directly from the loans. Half of the loans were given to female-headed households and promoted women's economic self-reliance. The project provided 350 loans as start-up capital, directly benefiting some 2,000 persons. For sustainability and close monitoring purposes, the management of the loans was turned over to the women's union and camp committees.

34. In the West Bank and Gaza, the World Bank allocated $12 million towards job-creation projects. The projects benefited mainly men as they constituted the majority of workers in infrastructure rehabilitation and agricultural sectors. However, 15 per cent of the jobs created went to women and the percentage of women who benefited indirectly was much higher.

35. The World Bank also implemented the "Second Community Development Project", which identified the need to include women on microprojects' committees. The project included targeted interventions, such as promoting women's training centres and nursery schools in order to benefit women directly. Through the Palestinian NGO Project, the World Bank financed 105 projects which provided development grants. Fifteen per cent of those projects benefited women directly.

36. Through its "Development Market Place 2000 Competition", the World Bank awarded a pilot project on "Pilot Training Centre for Disadvantaged Youth" which aimed to empower both young women and men through skills training.

37. UNRWA provided direct food and material assistance to special hardship case families, around 47 to 50 per cent of which were headed by women. From July 2000 until June 2001, a total of 33,172 participants benefited from the various activities of the Women's Programme Centre, such as skills training, awareness-raising lectures on health, social, gender, civic and disability issues as well as legal counselling, play centres and nursery schools. Furthermore, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) issued over $600,000 in loans to more than 160 women. The Solidarity Group Lending Programme had reached out to more than 260 women's groups since project-start-up, with a total amount of over $400,000. Self-support programmes, which provided part-grant, part-loan financial allocations to special hardship case families to help them reach financial self-sustainability, benefited over 131 women and their families.

IV. Other measures for women's empowerment

Human rights

38. With regard to violence and human rights, Palestinian women were impacted at different levels during the reporting period. On one hand, methods of arrest, administrative detention, methods of interrogation, conditions of detention and limited access to family and lawyers had a severe impact on Palestinians (see A/56/491). On the other hand, Palestinian women suffered from gender-related violence within society as well as within the family.

39. With regard to violence from Israeli authorities, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reported that there were 2,500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, many of whom continued to be subjected to psychological pressure and physical torture. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian People and Other Arabs in the Occupied Territories reported that there were 10 female Palestinian detainees in the Ramla Prison Female Section. The Special Committee reported the case of one woman who was beaten and had her hands and legs shackled to a bed from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. for two days. It also reported the case of two women who were kept in the same section as Israeli criminal prisoners and were subjected to attacks and harassment on a daily basis (see A/56/491). Those women prisoners protested against the prevailing conditions and asked for due representation, access to books, the media, letters, family visits and medical assistance. However, the prison administration did not respond to their demands. Female political leaders were kept together with Israeli criminal prisoners also in the Megiddo prison, where, owing to security reasons, family visits or telephone calls were restricted and access to lawyers was denied.

40. The Special Committee also reported that, on 23 January 2001, a Palestinian woman, suspected of luring an Israeli teenager to his death via an Internet relationship, petitioned the High Court of Justice demanding the right to meet with her lawyer. In her petition, she complained against the interrogation procedures of General Security Service interrogators. However, on 15 February 2001, the High Court of Justice issued a ruling stating that it was legal for the General Security Service to adopt interrogation procedures which would prevent suspects from sleeping, as long as the intention was to advance an investigation (see A/56/428).

41. With regard to gender-related violence within society and the family, a study funded by UNDP, and undertaken prior to the beginning of the second intifada, assessed the existing gaps hindering women from attaining equality and social justice within Palestinian society.[16] The study pointed out that Palestinian women and girls suffered from "honour crimes", rape, incest and other forms of violence, particularly at the family level. For instance, the study suggested that annually, several girls were either killed or threatened with death for tarnishing "family" honour

and that, in the period between 1996 and 1999, 38 cases of "honour crimes" had been documented. It also reported that, according to 1998 statistics issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, a total of 115 cases of rape or attempted rape occurred in the occupied Palestinian territory. However, given the taboo surrounding the issue of domestic violence, according to the study, figures did not necessarily adequately reflect the volume of the problem. Gender discrimination was also inherent in criminal legislation whereby the crimes of rape, indecent assault and incest fell under the category of "crimes against public morals and ethics" rather than "crimes against individuals". Such crimes were thus punished with shorter sentences.[17]

42. In situations of conflict or complex emergencies worldwide, many cases of increasing violence against women and girls are documented. Thus, it might be possible that, even in the occupied Palestinian territory, gender-related violence against women and girls was exacerbated by the political situation owing to the widespread frustration that the conflict was creating among Palestinians.

43. In order to address the issue of violence, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) implemented a project entitled "Helping victims of sexual abuse in Palestinian and Jordanian societies: strategies to aid disclosure and promote gender awareness within the criminal justice system" in February 2001. The project, implemented through the work of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in Ramallah and the Jordanian Women's Union, focused on the sexual abuse of women and the stigma that surrounded the disclosure of such abuse. Project activities included the organization of workshops with girls and boys in public schools, aimed at creating a more open environment to discuss abuse as well as the production of a database on honour killings.

44. The Sustainable Human Development Unit of UNDP, through the Women's Rights Campaign, funded three television spots on violence against women, as well as a study day on "poverty and violence" in relation to Palestinian women. In order to address the issue of women's human rights, UNDP also supported the formulation of "A gap analysis report on the status of women in the Palestinian territories in the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", carried out in cooperation with the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling.

Peace and security

45. In the follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, which recognized the important role played by women in conflict prevention and resolution as well as post-conflict peace-building, the Arab States Regional Office of UNIFEM, together with the Jerusalem office of UNDP, carried out a study on the impact of armed conflict on Palestinian women, in collaboration with the Women's Department of Birzeit University. The study undertook an analysis of the ways in which the current conflict had altered the status and situation of women, both individually and within the Palestinian community, and how those changes impacted on the provision of social services, education and advocacy support for women in the Palestinian territory. It was expected to be completed by the end of 2001.

Decision-making

46. Despite the contributions of Palestinian women in most areas of development, their participation in the process of decision-making was remarkably low. Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicated that, in 1996, women represented only 6 per cent of Legislative Council members, 8 per cent of Palestine National Council members, 8 per cent of Ministers and 8 per cent of Labour Union members.[18] In the judiciary, there were three female judges, but there was no woman judge in the religious courts.[19] There were insufficient statistics on the membership rate of women to make any assessment of the participation of women in all the political parties.

47. On the issue of women in decision-making, UNIFEM funded a project on the Empowerment of women's leadership which was implemented by the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy. The project promoted gender awareness and capacity-building among Palestinian media professionals.

Awareness-raising

48. In order to create awareness about the situation of Palestinian women regionally and worldwide, the United Nations Department of Public Information undertook several activities. United Nations Radio produced numerous radio programmes, including a

programme entitled "Women in black gain prominence". This international movement of women, initiated in 1988 by a group of Israeli women protesting the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, spread to many countries as a movement against violence. The Middle East Radio Unit produced seven features on the social, economic and political hardships faced by women in the occupied Palestinian territory. Among its activities on the question of Palestine, the Department of Public Information also organized a training programme for a group of nine Palestinian media practitioners, including four women, aimed at strengthening their professional capacity as media personnel.

Gender mainstreaming

49. UNIFEM implemented a regional project entitled "Post Beijing follow-up operation — phase II", which achieved tangible results in building the institutional and organizational capacity of the General Union of Palestinian Women, as well as that of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women, to implement their national strategies and action plans for the advancement of women in the Palestinian territory. The project built the capacity of gender focal points in non-governmental organizations and line ministries to effectively advocate and mobilize Governments and other stakeholders to integrate a gender equality perspective into national planning and policy-making. It also played a facilitating role in establishing a network of Palestinian journalists around gender issues.

50. The UNDP Sustainable Human Development Unit reported that it was developing a comprehensive strategy to build capacity among the staff of the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People to adopt a gender mainstreaming approach on the programme and project level and, more generally, to raise the level of awareness on gender issues.

51. The UNDP Sustainable Human Development Unit also initiated a project to support women's units within various ministries. Furthermore, it funded the establishment of a Gender Statistics Unit at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, whose purpose was to strengthen the Bureau's capacity to produce and disseminate statistics related to gender issues.

V. Conclusions

52. In the reporting period, the violent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians had a significant negative effect on Palestinian women. Many women were killed or wounded and/or lost their husbands, children or other family members. Furthermore, the economic and social conditions of women were severely affected by the crisis as poverty rates continued to increase while access to basic services, such as education and health, was severely curtailed for women and girls.

53. During the crisis, the Palestinian Authority, civil society groups and organizations of the United Nations system have made considerable efforts to improve the conditions of Palestinian women and to encourage a negotiated solution. In particular, the United Nations organizations and specialized agencies reacted immediately to the emergency situation and shifted their focus from long-term sustainable development projects to the implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes aimed at meeting the urgent requirements of Palestinian women.[20]

54. In view of the current crisis, it is essential that United Nations entities continue to operate in the occupied territory and the refugee camps and that the focus on the advancement of women, particularly in areas such as education, health, social welfare, human rights, employment and economic empowerment, is strengthened. The meaningful work undertaken by UNRWA, as regards activities which benefit some 3.8 million Palestine refugees, including women and children, should be further supported.

55. Since the status and living conditions of Palestinian women are linked to the achievement of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, new efforts need to be made by the international community in order to end the violent confrontations in the occupied Palestinian territory. In this regard, it is particularly important that women are fully involved in any conflict-resolution and peace-building initiatives to be undertaken in the region in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). It is also important that efforts be made to increase women's full participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

56. The gender perspective should continue to be fully integrated in international assistance programmes,

through, inter alia, greater gender analysis and the collection of sex-disaggregated data. It is also important that a gender perspective be introduced in all studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations on the situation of the Palestinian people.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/56/35).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories on the Palestinian Economy, Spring 2001, 6 September 2001, Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, p. 1.

[6] Ibid., p. 2.

[7] See the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories on the impact on the Palestinian economy of confrontation, border closures and mobility restrictions, 1 October 2000 to 30 June 2001, Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, p. 16.

[8] Ibid.

[9] These UNRWA statistics were taken from a presentation made by the United Nations Population Fund entitled "Aspects of the crises: clashes between Palestinians and Israelis".

[10] Ibid.

[11] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/56/35).

[12] "Discouraged workers" included those who exited the labour force and those of working age who never entered the labour force owing to their belief that it would have been impossible to find a job (see the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories on the Palestinian economy, Spring 2001, 6 September 2001, Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, p. 17).

[13] See the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories on the impact on the Palestinian economy of confrontation, border closures and mobility restrictions, 1 October 2000 to 30 June 2001, Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, p. 10.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 30.

[16] See the gap analysis report on the status of Palestinian women in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2001, pp. 5-8.

[17] Ibid., p. 9.

[18] Statistics were taken from the web site of the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (http://www.pcbs.org/english/gender/gdr.htm).

[19] See the gap analysis report on the status of Palestinian women in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2001, p. 14.

[20] The humanitarian assistance programmes of the United Nations system were coordinated through the Humanitarian Task Force for Emergency Needs, established on 3 October 2000. The Task Force was chaired by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories and comprised representatives of the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations system, the donor community, the International Committee of the Red Cross and key international non-governmental organizations (see A/56/123-E/2001/97 and Corr.1).